



**Independent
Age**



Caring for someone

**How to get the
support you need**



Thank you

We would like to thank those who shared their experiences and expertise as this guide was being developed. Our special thanks go to Carers Trust, Carers Wales and the Scottish Government – Carers Policy Department.

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We spoke to older people about their experiences. Their quotes appear throughout. We have changed the names of some of the interviewees who wished to be anonymous. Some of the images seen throughout this guide are posed by friends of Independent Age.

The PIF TICK is the UK-wide Quality Mark for Health Information.

About this guide

At some point in our lives most of us will look after someone when they become ill or disabled. There are around 10.6 million unpaid carers in the UK.

You may gradually take on caring responsibilities over time and may not think of yourself as a carer. Or there may be a sudden change that means you take on a caring role. While it can be positive and rewarding, looking after someone can also be emotionally, physically and financially demanding.

This guide explains your rights and the benefits, services and support that may be available to help you look after someone else.

We spoke to carers about their experiences. Their quotes appear throughout.



In this guide, you'll find references to our other free publications. You can order them by calling **0800 319 6789**, or by visiting **independentage.org/publications**.



1. What it means to be a carer

Many people look after someone else but don't realise that they are carers.

1. What it means to be a carer

If you're helping someone with their daily life because they're ill or disabled, or can't manage without your support, then you may be a carer. You may also be a carer if you intend to provide care – for example, if you plan to provide care for someone who will be unable to manage without your support in the future.

“ In a way, my mum doesn't recognise herself as a carer. She just accepts that her husband is very ill and it is her duty (in sickness and in health, etc) to look after him.

Are you a carer?

If any of these statements apply to you, you're likely to be a carer.

- I help someone get washed, dressed or use the toilet.
- I make sure someone has enough to eat and drink and/or I help them to feed themselves.
- I take someone to GP and hospital appointments.
- I help someone to get around their home – for example, helping them to use stairs safely.
- I help someone keep their home clean and safe.
- I help someone to see their family or friends, or attend social activities.
- I make sure someone takes their medication at the right time and/or I help them to take their medication.
- I help someone with their budgeting and finances.
- I provide regular and ongoing emotional and/or practical support for someone.
- Without my support, the person I help would have difficulty managing on their own.

1. What it means to be a carer

The person you look after could be your partner, a friend or a family member and you may just think of it as part of your relationship. You may be a couple who are caring for each other. Whatever your situation, if you're providing unpaid support to someone, you may be entitled to some help as well.

How caring can affect you

Caring for someone can be rewarding but it can also be hard work. At times, it might seem overwhelming. It can also be financially and emotionally draining.

It may seem as though your life is no longer your own. You may feel a mixture of emotions such as guilt, resentment, sadness and frustration. It's common to experience stress or low mood.

It's important to recognise how you're feeling and that it's okay to feel this way. You shouldn't feel worried or unsure about asking for support.



To do

The first step to getting help is to ask for a carer's assessment from your local council – see **chapter 2**. In Scotland, you should ask for an Adult Carer Support Plan from your council or local carer centre.

Caring from a distance

If the person you're caring for lives far from you, it can be difficult to stay on top of things. Travelling is tiring and time-consuming, and can be costly.

Getting practical help from others can make things more manageable for you. Make sure the person you're caring for has had a care needs assessment from their local council – see **chapter 2**. This assessment would look at what their care needs are and, if they qualify for support, a personalised support plan may be created with them to make sure that their needs are met.

Getting online can be helpful for ordering shopping and helping someone to manage their finances. It's also a good way to stay in touch with the person you're caring for.

If you or the person you're caring for need help getting online, you could ask about free or low-cost courses at your local library or Online Centre (**0114 349 1666**, **onlinecentresnetwork.org**). Hi Digital, Vodafone's new online resource, can help you pick up digital skills (**independentage.org/hidigital**). Visit our technology webpages for more tips (**independentage.org/technology**).

1. What it means to be a carer

Caring and work

If you're finding it difficult to juggle work and caring responsibilities, you usually have the right to request flexible working if you've been with your employer for at least six months. This can include working from home, part-time work, flexitime, working compressed hours, job sharing and shift work.

You also have the right to take a reasonable amount of unpaid time off work to deal with an emergency, such as a breakdown in care arrangements. Contact Acas (**0300 123 1100**, [acas.org.uk](https://www.acas.org.uk)) or Carers UK (**0808 808 7777**, [carersuk.org](https://www.carersuk.org)) for advice about your rights at work.

In Scotland employers can sign up to the Carer Positive initiative. This means they commit to supporting staff who are carers with flexible policies and practices. Check the members list ([carerpositive.org/our-members](https://www.carerpositive.org/our-members)) to find out if your employer belongs to the scheme.



1. What it means to be a carer

Shared caring

You may be sharing caring responsibilities with other friends or family members. It's important to be organised and communicate so you know who is doing what.

You could use technology to organise care between you – for example, by using shared calendars or the Jointly app developed by Carers UK (jointlyapp.com). There's a small charge to set up the app.

Sometimes the care duties may seem to fall more heavily on one person. If you'd like more help from other family members but don't know how to ask, we have suggestions for how to start the conversation at independentage.org/talking-about-how-others-can-help.

“ I helped care for my mum during her last illness. She lived over 100 miles from me but close to my brother and his wife, who is a registered nurse. They did the bulk of the caring and I went down almost every other weekend to support them and give them some time on their own – and of course to be with Mum as her cancer developed.

1. What it means to be a carer

Other caring options

There may come a time when you need to consider other options. For example, perhaps the person you care for could move closer to you or even move in with you.



Our guide **Choosing where to live** has more information about your options.

“ Dad was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s. I couldn’t manage his needs on my own, so I had to find a care home for him. It took months of searching, but eventually I found a specialist dementia nursing home. The costs are high but Dad’s very settled. It’s so good to walk in and see that he is loved and well cared for.

If your friend or relative has a lot of care needs or their health gets worse, it might be that a care home ends up being the best option for them in the future. This could leave you with mixed feelings – relief that they will be getting the level of care they need, but also guilt or sadness.

It's important to remember that if you want to, you can still be involved in caring for your friend or relative if they move to a care home. Our guide **How to find the right care home** has more advice.





2. What help can I get as a carer?

If you provide unpaid care for a partner, friend or family member, it is your legal right to have a carer's assessment to talk about what help you need.

Anyone who is a carer can get an assessment, also known as an Adult Carer Support Plan in Scotland. It doesn't matter how much care you provide, whether it's practical or emotional support, or what your financial situation is – you are entitled to an assessment.

It's a good opportunity to discuss your needs as a carer and to see what support you can get from your local council (see **chapters 3** and **4**). It can help make life easier for you and the person you're caring for.

You will need to contact the council where the person you care for lives to request an assessment. In Scotland, you can request a support plan through your local health and social care partnership or your local carer centre.

2. What help can I get as a carer?

The assessment should look at how the care you provide affects your wellbeing and health, and how willing and able you are to provide care.

After the assessment, the local council will decide if you qualify for support, and what that support should be. In England, there is a national threshold that your council will use to work out whether you qualify for support from them. In Scotland and Wales, councils can set their own threshold for deciding who qualifies for support.



How to apply

Contact the adult social care team at your local council to arrange an assessment. This may be carried out over the phone, online, at home or somewhere other than your home if you prefer. In Scotland, this assessment is usually face to face. You may also be able to do a self-assessment.

If you think you've been waiting too long for your assessment, call the council and ask to speak to someone senior, such as the manager of the adult social care team, for an update.

If you need help urgently, make this clear to the council when you ask them for your assessment. Sometimes the council can choose to provide urgent help to the person who needs care before carrying out an assessment. In Scotland, for example, carers who care for someone with a life-limiting illness are entitled to a 'light touch' Adult Carer Support Plan, which they should receive within 10 working days of the original request. This support plan should focus on the immediate needs of the carer.

2. What help can I get as a carer?

How to prepare

The council should give you information explaining what will happen at the assessment. Ask for this in advance, including the questions you may be asked.

It's a good idea to think about how being a carer affects you and what might help you. You might want to keep a diary of everything you do for one or two weeks before the assessment.



Things to consider

Are you getting enough sleep or is it disturbed by your caring role?

Is your health affected? If so, how?

Are you able to go out without worrying about the safety of the person you care for?

Are your other relationships being affected?

Do you need information about what support and benefits are available?



2. What help can I get as a carer?

Is your caring role having an impact on your job?

What equipment does the person you care for need to enable you to care for them safely?

Do you need any training – for example, in first aid or in moving and handling the person you care for?

Do you want to spend less time in your caring role? For example, you may wish to go back to work, attend a course or just have more time to yourself.



If you'd like to talk to someone about your carer's assessment and how to prepare, call the Carers UK helpline (**0808 808 7777**, carersuk.org/help-and-advice/helpline-and-other-support).

If you live in Scotland, contact Care Information Scotland (**0800 011 3200**, careinfoscotland.scot) or your local carer centre (find your local carer centre at careinfoscotland.scot/topics/support-for-carers/carer-centres).



You can also contact our free Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to arrange to speak to an adviser.

2. What help can I get as a carer?

If you need help during the assessment

You can ask for other people to be involved, for example a friend or your GP, and the council should include them in the assessment – either face to face or by phoning or writing to them. These people can help you explain the impact caring has on your health or daily life.

If you think it would be difficult for you to express your views, you may want an independent advocate to help you.



See our factsheet **Helping you get your voice heard: Independent advocacy** for more information.

Assessing your ability to provide care

In England and Wales, your assessment must look at your ability and your willingness to continue providing care. It must also look at how you'll manage in the future. Think carefully about how it's affecting you. Consider your physical, mental and emotional health, and your feelings and choices about caring. If you're struggling or you can't manage any more, don't be afraid to say so.

In Scotland, your Adult Carer Support Plan should take your physical and mental wellbeing into account. For example, the plan should include information about your need for a break from your caring responsibilities.

If you find after your assessment that you're no longer willing or able to look after someone, tell the council as soon as possible. Ask them to carry out, or review, a care needs assessment for the person you care for. Tell them if the situation is urgent.

2. What help can I get as a carer?

Getting a needs assessment for the person you're caring for

If the person you're caring for hasn't had one already, you should ask your local council to carry out a free needs assessment for them as well as a carer's assessment for you. This could be done at the same time as your assessment if you wish.

Their assessment will work out:

- what their care needs are
- whether any care and support would help them in their daily life
- if they qualify for council help.



In England, the assessor may ask about how you support them as a carer, but they cannot take this into account when assessing the needs of the person you care for.

If you live in Scotland, the local authority will take the care you provide into account when carrying out a needs assessment.

In Wales, if the person you're caring for has some needs already being met, by you or in another capacity, then the local council do not have to meet these care needs – but they should still be included in the care plan.



See our factsheet **First steps in getting help with your care needs** for more information about care needs assessments.

2. What help can I get as a carer?

After your carer's assessment

If the council decide that you qualify for support and they are going to pay for some or all of it, they must prepare a support plan with you. See **chapter 3** for examples of the practical support you could get.

In England and Wales, the council cannot charge you for any care and support for the person you look after – however, they may charge you for a service they provide directly to you. In Scotland, the council must not charge for any support for the carer.



See our factsheet **Getting help from the council as a carer** to find out more about a carer's assessment.

If you don't qualify for help from the council

If you don't qualify for support, the council should write to you to explain why. They must also give you advice about things you can do to help you manage in your caring role. For example, they may tell you about local support services for carers.

Having this information and a copy of your carer's assessment will make it easier if you want to challenge the council's decision or make a complaint.



Our factsheet **Complaints about social care services** has more information.





3. Practical support

Practical support can make your caring role easier and give you more time for other activities. It could be anything from equipment at home to respite care so you can take a break.

Help from the council

If you qualify for support, your local council might provide care and support to the person you care for, or provide you with support directly. This could include:

- practical help with things like housework or gardening
- advice about benefits
- leisure activities such as gym membership
- training to help you feel more confident in your caring role (such as moving and handling training)
- emotional support from other carers (such as attending a local carers group)
- breaks from caring (called respite care).

In Scotland, you may be able to get some or all of the above support through your local carer centre. Find your local carer centre at careinfoscotland.scot/topics/support-for-carers/carers-centres.

3. Practical support

Aids, adaptations and technology

Different types of equipment or home adaptations can make your life easier, particularly if you have to lift the person you're caring for or help them move. It can also help the person you're looking after to stay safe and independent.

If the council assesses them as needing an aid or minor adaptation (one that costs less than £1,000 to install in England and Wales or £1,500 to install in Scotland), or specialist disability equipment like a hoist, the council must provide this for free.

There also may be grants available for larger adaptations. In England and Wales, you can get a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). The limit is £30,000 in England and £36,000 in Wales. These grants help with the cost of adapting a home to make it easier for someone with a disability to use. This could include things like a replacing a bath with a level-access (walk-in) shower.



See our factsheet **Adapting your home to stay independent** for more information.

Technology can help the person you look after to live safely at home and give you peace of mind.

You could get:

- telecare – alarms and sensors that can detect a range of problems, such as if they fall out of bed while you're sleeping
- telehealth – a way of monitoring someone's health remotely through equipment that's set up in their home.



See our factsheet **Technology to help you at home** to find out more.

3. Practical support

You may be able to get telecare as part of a package from your council or you may have to pay for it privately. Contact the Disabled Living Foundation for information about what may be available (**0300 999 0004**, livingmadeeasy.org.uk).

“ If you’re worried about leaving someone by themselves because they may leave the house and wander, you could get sensors that alert you if they’ve opened their front door.

Anna, Independent Age adviser

Help from your GP

Tell your GP that you are a carer and ask them to make a note of this on your records. Caring can take a toll on your own health, so it's important you look after yourself as well – see **chapter 5**.

“ When caring for my mum after a stroke, I mentioned to my GP that I was having to take on a caring role. She was very helpful in pointing out to me that I had to make time for myself. It was as though she gave me permission to put myself first sometimes.

3. Practical support

Your GP can give you information about the medical condition of the person you look after. They may put you in touch with support services provided by the NHS and other local sources of support and advice.

Your GP could also:

- arrange medical appointments for you and the person you care for at the same time, so you only have to make one visit
- arrange for repeat prescriptions to be delivered to your local pharmacy or home
- provide letters of support to help you claim benefits. Some GPs charge for this.



Good to know

The person you're caring for can give consent for their GP to discuss their health with you, so you can be involved in decisions about their care. Talk to them to find out if they're willing to do this.

Help from charities and carers networks

You can get a lot of practical and emotional support from charities and carers networks. They understand the challenges you face and can give you the chance to talk to people who are in a similar position. The services they offer vary, but they can usually give you information and advice about your rights, benefits and other financial help, and respite care. They can also put you in touch with local support groups.

For more information, contact Carers UK (**0808 808 7777, [carersuk.org](https://www.carersuk.org)**) or the Carers Trust (**0300 772 9600, [carers.org](https://www.carers.org)**). You can find details of your local carers centre on **[carers.org/help-and-info/carer-services-near-you](https://www.carers.org/help-and-info/carer-services-near-you)**, or **[careinfoscotland.scot/topics/support-for-carers/carer-centres](https://www.careinfoscotland.scot/topics/support-for-carers/carer-centres)** if you live in Scotland.

3. Practical support

Making emergency plans

You need to know that care would be put in place quickly in an emergency – for example, if you became ill or were admitted to hospital. If the person you care for gets help from the council, their care and support plan should include an emergency plan. You can also create one by writing down:

- the name, address and other contact details of the person you care for
- who you would like to be contacted in an emergency
- any medication the person you care for is taking
- any ongoing care or health treatment they need.



If possible, talk to friends and family to find out what help they might be able to provide to the person you care for in an emergency.

In Scotland, your Adult Carer Support Plan should include information about an emergency plan. Many carer centres can also help with emergency planning. You can also create an emergency plan through ENABLE Scotland (**0300 0200 101**, **enable.org.uk/get-support-information/families-carers/future-planning/emergency-planning**).

Local authorities in England and Wales are also advised to include information in your support plan about what will happen in an emergency.

In some areas, there are carer's emergency card schemes. You can register and get help to draw up an emergency plan. You'll get a card with the scheme's telephone number and a unique identification number. If you're unable to provide care, you or someone with you can call the number and an operator will put your emergency plan into action.



To do

Ask your local council or a local carers' organisation if there is a scheme in your area.

3. Practical support

Making decisions

The person you're caring for may want to consider putting in place powers of attorney. This allows you to help them make certain decisions, or to make them on their behalf in the future if they are unable to do so – financial decisions, for example.



For more information, see our factsheet **Managing my affairs if I become ill.**



Getting respite care

You may want to take a break from caring so you can do other household tasks, take part in leisure or social activities, or catch up on sleep. You could consider respite care – this is replacement care for the person you look after, so they're supported while you take a break.

You can ask your local council to help, even if the person you care for doesn't currently get any help from them. If the council agrees to help, they will arrange respite care while you take your break. You can't be charged for this but the person you're caring for might be. The council will look at the person's finances to see if they should pay anything towards it.

There are different options available, including:

- care services at home – home care agencies employ care workers to visit people and provide care in their own home. For more information, see our factsheet **Arranging home care**
- day care centres – the person you're caring for can receive support and socialise with others while you have a break

3. Practical support

- sitting services – some charities and carers' organisations offer sitting services. These give you the chance to take a break for a couple of hours while a trained volunteer gives basic support and keeps the person you care for company
- care homes – some care homes offer short-term stays for respite care. If you're not going through the council, you could contact local care homes to see if they have places available for this.

Your local council will be able to advise you about services in your area. Some carers' organisations provide help with respite care. You can also arrange replacement care yourself.

In Scotland, the Time to Live grant (sharedcarescotland.org.uk/shortbreaksfund/timetolive) makes it possible for carers to take short breaks. See **chapter 4** for information about short breaks for people caring for grandchildren.

Going on holiday

If you want to go on holiday with the person you care for, some charities such as Revitalise (**0303 303 0145**, revitalise.org.uk) and MindforYou (**01509 351 008**, mindforyou.co.uk) can help you arrange one. You may be able to get some help with costs – see **chapter 4**.

In Wales, mirus can provide short breaks at a residential respite house (**02920 236 216**, mirus-wales.org.uk/how-we-can-help/respite). For detailed information about accessible holidays, contact Disabled Holidays (**0161 260 0224**, disabledholidays.com). Plan ahead and make arrangements in advance, if possible.

“ Mum is the sweetest person but it’s still tiring and very trying. We have managed a short holiday every year though. My brother comes to stay and the council provides extra evening care while we’re away.



4. Financial support

Caring for someone can be costly, especially if you've been doing it for a long time. You may qualify for extra money as a carer, so make sure you check.

Carer's Allowance

If you're caring for a family member or a friend for 35 hours or more a week, you may be able to claim Carer's Allowance.

You might qualify if the person you care for receives a qualifying disability benefit, such as:

- Attendance Allowance
- the middle or higher rate care component of Disability Living Allowance
- the daily living component of Personal Independence Payment
- either rate of the daily living component of Adult Disability Payment (in Scotland)
- Constant Attendance Allowance
- Armed Forces Independence Payment.

You won't qualify for Carer's Allowance if you have average weekly earnings over a certain amount. This amount may change slightly each tax year, but for April 2023/24 this is £139 a week after certain deductions. Money you get from personal and workplace pensions does not count as earnings, but your State Pension does.

4. Financial support



Being awarded Carer's Allowance can affect the benefits of the person you're caring for. For example, they will stop getting a severe disability premium paid with their benefits. Call our Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to arrange a benefits check.

How to claim Carer's Allowance

You can download a claim form or claim online at **gov.uk/carers-allowance/how-to-claim**, or phone the Carer's Allowance Unit (**0800 731 0297**) to ask for a claim form. If you're already claiming a State Pension, there's a different, shorter form to fill in.

If you need help filling in the form, call our free Helpline on **0800 319 6789** or email **advice@independentage.org** to book an appointment with an adviser.

If you live in Scotland, you may also qualify for Carer's Allowance Supplement. This is an extra payment for people who already receive Carer's Allowance on a specific date. If you qualify for the supplement, you will get two payments a year. You will get a letter from Social Security Scotland before each payment is made.

Extra money added to your means-tested benefits

Means-tested benefits, such as Pension Credit and Housing Benefit, are designed to support you by giving you enough money to live on. If you get Carer's Allowance or have an underlying entitlement to it, you could get a higher rate of these benefits, or you could qualify for them for the first time.

Having an underlying entitlement means that you qualify for Carer's Allowance, but you won't be paid it because you're already getting more than the rate of Carer's Allowance from certain other benefits.



Read our factsheet **Underlying entitlement to Carer's Allowance** for more information.

Call our Helpline on **0800 319 6789** to arrange a free benefits check, or try our online benefits calculator at **independentage.org/benefits-calculator**.

In Scotland, Carer's Allowance will soon be replaced by Carer Support Payment. If you live in Scotland and are receiving Carer's Allowance, you will be transferred to the new benefit once it has been rolled out. You will not need to apply again for Carer Support Payment.

4. Financial support

Protecting your entitlement to the State Pension and other benefits

If you're under State Pension age, Carer's Credit is a National Insurance credit that helps to fill gaps in your National Insurance contribution record so you can build your entitlement to benefits like the State Pension.

To qualify, you must care for one or more people for at least 20 hours a week. They must either receive one of the qualifying disability benefits listed on **page 43**, or a health or social care professional must sign a Care Certificate to show they have a certain level of care needs.

If you're not receiving Carer's Allowance, you'll need to fill in a claim form for Carer's Credit. Download a form from **gov.uk/carers-credit/how-to-claim** or call the Carer's Allowance Unit on **0800 731 0297** to ask for one.

Council Tax discounts

You may qualify for some Council Tax discounts – for example, if you live with the person you're caring for and they have a disability or severe mental impairment.



See our guide **Council Tax** for more information.

“ Other carers told us about so many little things that can make a difference to those who have some savings – things that aren't means-tested, such as Attendance Allowance, Blue Badges and a reduction in Council Tax.

4. Financial support

Caring and grandchildren

If you're looking after a grandchild on a short- or long-term basis, you may be able to get benefits such as Child Benefit and Specified Adult Childcare credits.

If you're in this situation, get advice from an organisation like Family Rights Group (**0808 801 0366**, frg.org.uk) in England; Children 1st (**08000 28 22 33**, children1st.org.uk/parentline) in Scotland; or Children in Wales (**029 2034 2434**, childreninwales.org.uk).

In Scotland, the Take a Break Scotland Fund (**01904 571093**, takeabreakscotland.org.uk) provides grants for short breaks to carers looking after seriously ill and disabled children.

Grants and discounts

As a carer, you may qualify for grants from charities to help pay for respite care, disability equipment and aids, and other essential one-off costs. You can search for grants on the Turn2us website (grants-search.turn2us.org.uk).

If you live in Scotland, you may qualify for a Crisis Grant or Community Care Grant from the Scottish Welfare Fund. Find out more at mygov.scot/scottish-welfare-fund.



Read our factsheet **Extra help with essential costs if you're on a low income** for more information about help you could get if you're experiencing financial difficulties.

4. Financial support

Some carers' organisations also offer grants and discount schemes. You may be able to get other discounts, such as travel concessions and cheaper cinema tickets, if you accompany someone as a carer. Contact Turn2us for more information (**0808 802 2000**, **turn2us.org.uk**).

Some carer centres in Scotland provide discount cards for carers to use in their area. Find your local centre at Care Information Scotland (**careinfoscotland.scot/topics/support-for-carers/carer-centres**) to ask for more information.



Dennis's story

For me, it is the emotional demands of caring, rather than the physical demands, that are very high. We are looking after people in material ways far beyond just washing and caring for them physically.

By talking to others you see that this is the situation others are in as well. That is a help, and it helps to go to a different environment as well, it takes me out of myself. Going to the centre means I walk through four or five different neighbourhoods, and it takes me out of my head. Going to the gym also helps because it's a social activity and I enjoy that.



5. Taking care of yourself

Being a carer can be emotionally and physically demanding. You may be so busy looking after someone else that you neglect your own health.

It's important that you take good care of yourself, not only for your own sake but also to give you the strength to go on in your caring role.

“ Your horizons will shrink and sometimes it will be all you can do to get through the day. At those times it can help just to look at the couple of hours ahead of you. Take small steps and appreciate small victories (a cup of tea made and drunk before it got cold). Be kind to yourself – you are doing all you can – and pat yourself on the back for your achievements.

5. Taking care of yourself

Get support from others

It's a good idea to talk to someone about your situation and how you're feeling. Tell your friends, family and GP that you are a carer so they're aware of the pressure you're under.

It can be helpful to talk to people in the same situation, to share experiences and get advice. You could join an online carers forum or a carers group. Carers UK has an online forum and can also help put you in touch with local groups (**0808 808 7777**, **[carersuk.org/help-and-advice/get-support/carersuk-forum](https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/get-support/carersuk-forum)**).

In Scotland, you can speak to your local carer centre about support groups near you. Find your local centre at Care Information Scotland (**[careinfoscotland.scot/topics/support-for-carers/carers-centres](https://www.careinfoscotland.scot/topics/support-for-carers/carers-centres)**).

You could also contact your local Age UK (**0800 169 6565**, **[ageuk.org.uk/local](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/local)**) or ask your council about support groups in your area.

Organisations for people with a specific health condition or illness, such as Alzheimer's, arthritis, Parkinson's disease or stroke, also offer support for carers – you can find contact details at independentage.org/get-advice/health-and-care/living-long-term-health-conditions/get-support-long-term-condition.

“ Don't be afraid or too proud to ask for help. Friends are often willing to listen when you need to vent your frustrations and can make suggestions you may not come up with for yourself. Neighbours can be another unexpected source of support.

5. Taking care of yourself

Take care of your health

Looking after someone can affect both your physical and mental health, but there are steps you can take to stay well.

Try to follow a balanced diet, get some regular exercise and get enough rest. If you're having trouble sleeping, speak to your GP. Carers UK have advice about how to eat well as a carer (**0808 808 7777**, [carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health/nutrition/eating-well](https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health/nutrition/eating-well)).

You could also ask your GP about health checks and screening programmes. You qualify for a free flu jab if you're the main carer for an older or disabled person who may be at risk if you fall ill.

“ Look after yourself is the golden rule. You can't care for anyone if you're ill yourself. I found that during my father's care, my mum lost herself a bit. We'd make an effort to give her a few hours each week to herself – even something as simple as a relaxing bath, undisturbed, helped Mum to hold on to her sanity.

The challenges of caring could make you more vulnerable to stress and mental health problems.



See our guide **Dealing with depression** for advice on how to cope if you're feeling low.

If you'd like to talk to someone about what's troubling you, call Samaritans (**116 123, [samaritans.org](https://www.samaritans.org)**). You could also contact the Mind information line to find out about support in your area (**0300 123 3393, [mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk)**).

If you live in Scotland, contact the Scottish Association for Mental Health (**0344 800 0550, [samh.org.uk](https://www.samh.org.uk)**) or visit the National Wellbeing Hub (**[wellbeinghub.scot/resource/unpaid-carers](https://www.wellbeinghub.scot/resource/unpaid-carers)**) for support.



If your low mood continues, speak to your GP.

If your caring responsibilities are affecting your health, make sure you mention this during your carer's assessment – see **chapter 2**.

5. Taking care of yourself

Look after your relationships

Taking care of someone can change your relationship. It can also put a strain on other relationships with friends and family. If you're caring for a partner it may take time to adjust to your changed situation.

“ My mum appreciated all of the practical things we did for her, but what she appreciated most was us spending time with her, doing everyday things like swapping words from the word puzzle in the newspaper, watching TV or going out for a short drive. It was important not to lose that invaluable personal relationship.

You may find it helpful to speak to a specialist relationship counsellor. Contact Relate to find out about services in your area (**0300 003 0396**, **relate.org.uk**). If you live in Scotland, contact Relationships Scotland (**0345 119 2020**, **relationships-scotland.org.uk**). There's usually a charge for counselling sessions.

Being a carer may sometimes leave you feeling lonely and isolated. It's important for your mental health to keep in touch with family and friends, even if it's just a quick phone call.



Our guide **If you're feeling lonely** has some helpful tips for ways to stay connected.

5. Taking care of yourself

Make sure you get a regular break from caring, even if it's only 10 minutes. It's important for your quality of life to find time to do the things you enjoy. If this is difficult for you, mention it at your assessment.

You could ask friends or family to help. You could also use telecare to help keep the person you look after safe and give you peace of mind when you're not with them. See **page 31** for more information.

You may be able to arrange respite care to give you a regular break, or for a longer period to give you the chance to go on holiday – see **chapter 3**.

“ I can feel my life passing and hope there will still be time to do some of the things we had planned. In the meantime, I have found a lot of support online and I've taken up some online courses – art, photography, creative writing. I meet a friend once a week for swimming and lunch, get out for daily walks, and I've adopted a cat, which Mum loves.

Checklist

- Ask for a carer's assessment or an Adult Carer Support Plan – see **chapter 2**.
- Ask for a care needs assessment for the person you're looking after if they haven't already had one – see **chapter 2**.
- Ask your local council about aids and adaptations – see **chapter 3**.
- Apply for Carer's Allowance or Carer Support Payment – see **chapter 4**.
- Make sure you're claiming all the benefits you're entitled to – see **chapter 4**.
- Consider getting a lasting power of attorney for the person you look after – see **chapter 3**.
- Tell your friends, family and GP that you're a carer and ask your GP to make a note on your records – see **chapter 3**.
- Make a plan to deal with emergencies – for example, if illness affects your ability to provide care – see **chapter 3**.
- Find out what support you can get to help you cope emotionally, such as joining a carers support group – see **chapter 5**.

About Independent Age

At Independent Age, we want more people in the UK to live a happy, connected and purposeful later life. That's why we support people aged over 65 to get involved in things they enjoy. We also campaign and give advice on the issues that matter most: health and care, money and housing.

For information or advice – we can arrange a free, impartial chat with an adviser – call us on freephone **0800 319 6789** (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 5.30pm) or email us at **advice@independentage.org**.

You can also support this work by volunteering with us, joining our campaigns to improve life for older people experiencing hardship, donating to us or remembering us in your will.

For more information, visit **[independentage.org](https://www.independentage.org)** or call us on **0800 319 6789**.



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